

# Seattle Light Rail Review Panel

## Meeting Notes for April 5, 2000

### Agenda Items

Schematic Design Briefing on Martin Luther King Jr. Way Corridor

#### Commissioners Present

Jon Layzer, Chair  
Matthew Kitchen  
Carolyn Law  
Jay Lazerwitz  
Jack Mackie  
Rick Sundberg  
Paul Tomita

#### Staff Present

Debora Ashland, Sound Transit  
Marty Curry, Planning Commission  
Barbara Goldstein, Arts Commission  
Lisa Merz, CityDesign  
Cheryl Sizov, LRRP

Jon Layzer chaired the meeting. LRRP business was taken care of, including the introduction of Lisa Merz as new staff to City Design and approval of the March 15, 2000 minutes. Carol Valenta distributed a pamphlet regarding art and the light rail. The presentation of the Martin Luther King Jr. corridor commenced.

### Schematic Design Briefing for Martin Luther King Jr. Way Corridor

*Henry Boyar, Hough, Beck, and Baird*  
*Jonathan Jackson, Sound Transit*  
*Jeanne Krikawa, Sound Transit*  
*Julia Walton, Arai Jackson*

Jean Krikawa began the presentation with an overview of the MLK corridor and background information. Reference was made to the LRRP meeting on December 10, 1999, along with a public meeting which was held on January 27, 2000. It was noted that safety issues could not be isolated in regards to Urban Design issues. The City will operate and maintain the street, while Sound Transit has made the commitment to maintain stations. Two of the biggest issues are landscaping in general, and location of street trees relative to the curb and sidewalk. Currently planning for a 10' 3" sidewalk width, which narrows to 5 feet where the trees are planted. Planting in the shadows—or the gore area—was discussed; the direction now is for low ground cover there since there may not be room for trees. Another unresolved issue is irrigation. The City does not require irrigation but a three year landscaping maintenance longevity plan is being discussed. Some kind of plan is needed so that the planting will survive. Meetings have taken place with City Light and SeaTran regarding maintenance and cost. A strong tree replacement plan should be in effect so that replacement trees fit with existing trees and coincide with the growth of other new trees. Another issue is the lighting. One proposal includes the issue of non-standard light fixtures. City Light would be responsible for stocking and maintaining replacement parts and the impact this would have on them needs to be addressed. Pedestrian and bicycle access was discussed at station locations along with parking and bicycle paths. In particular, Sound Transit has developed and evaluated some sidewalk resolutions at the Othello station.

Jonathan Jackson then began an update on Cheasty, Edmunds, and South Henderson street improvements related to Link stations. Sound Transit and the City are discussing whether Sound Transit will give funding to the City to implement the improvements, or do them themselves. The Henderson connection may continue on through Rainier Avenue to Seward Park. Alaska is also an important connection, but more for buses and cars than pedestrians. It has been called the "Street of Wheels". Bicycles, buses, light rail, and cars will be using this intersection. A signal light would be ideal for the Alaska intersection although it is currently not included in the budget. Another issue is where the TPSS stations will be located along with the size of the structure. Bicycle traffic will flow up Myrtle as well as Othello, so these are logical locations for bike parking. This will also lead to access through New Holly and to Chief Sealth Park. The idea of having a bike plaza located on the northeast corner of Myrtle has been discussed. At Henderson, the idea of having a circular pattern for the busses to turn around is being explored rather than having an off-street bus facility.

The Othello Station will have the best bus service by far. Residents will be able to catch a rail or bus and ride across town or go to the grocery store. Service will be vastly improved with local buses providing good, frequent service to residents. We have also met with the ADA community which embraced the plans. They thought that areas could be larger, but overall they were happy with the designs. The ADA community particularly liked the "Pedestrian Islands". These are areas in the middle of the street that can be used as resting points in case pedestrians can't make it across the street during the light cycle. They will be able to stand here and wait. Previously there were only two pedestrian-only crossings, seven new ones have been added with the redesign of MLK.

Gabe then presented a traffic simulation which depicted how transit traffic will be integrated into bus, automobile, and pedestrian traffic. The ability to time signals so that transit will be able to flow smoother in traffic was discussed. There will be specific phasing for each intersection. Trains will be able to prompt turn signals so no cars get stuck at intersections.

Julie Walton then discussed three design concepts for the Corridor developed to date; The Corridor of Lights, Green Corridor, and Enhanced Corridor. Various corridor conditions were examined, such as how will the lighting be reflected during day or night, rain or shine. Throughout the whole MLK Jr. corridor, the street meanders through very diverse neighborhoods and land use—from very green to very commercial. The team feels the Corridor of Lights concept has the most merit and should be pursued further. Nonetheless, there are physical constraints that affect these concepts. The success of the corridor of lights means that the infrastructure is working for us, the light being the major element.

The "Great Street" concept must look at the long term land use changes that will occur over time due to the economic redevelopment of the area. Sound Transit's work is the "spine" of the Great Street. The Corridor of Lights concept can help improve public safety and provide some magic and delight to the street with seasonal lighting and uplighting of trees and stations. Station and crossing lighting will continue all the way down the street. Since there are transitional areas all along the corridor, each area will be looked at individually. Residential areas will be viewed with the idea of safety and comfort for resident. Commercial lighting will need to encourage shoppers and create a safe environment. Industrial areas will be lit to allow ease of movements among trucks while still preserving the existing curb cuts.

Drawing of walkways were shown exhibiting location of lighting and type of pavements which could be used. The idea of the infrastructure and how all this would work was discussed and the main thoughts were that the lighting is the key thing, along with tree placement. One recommendation was that the lights be parallel on both sides of the street which would create an impression of regularity. The lights

would be placed about 100 to 150 feet apart. The panel is looking for existing fixtures with good functionality. Lights that create an individual identity for MLK Jr. are sought along with a modern flavor, and one that works with the OCS. It is important to note that the OCS is still in design so no final decisions have been made on the type of light fixture. The weight, size and connections of poles must be considered.

Julia then discussed the possible pole lighting in more detail. It would be 25 feet in height, have raised knobs, and banners or flower pots could be hung by merchants. A strong light is cast into the street and because of the pearly acrylic top, the light from above creates a kind of glow. This type of fixture works the light to the greatest advantage. The lighting and OCS concepts must work together!! The various types of lights are similar in forms but not identical. The location and placement are essential.

Henry Boyar discussed landscaping along the right-of-way. The right-of-way is being physically expanded and he hopes that we can leave a legacy of lush street trees. There are many trees which will do well in the right-of-way. The City has a list of approved trees and the canopy of the tree will need to physically fit in the space and maintenance should be easier with a consistent selection of trees. Some types will be strongly recommended in residential zones while others will need to go in industrial zones. Various locations will be looked at individually and the appropriate type of tree will be placed according to its canopy and characteristics. Paving in the right-of-way was also discussed. A heavy broom finish to the sidewalk was discussed along with the ideas of incorporating various grids to create patterns. If the utilities are placed underground, this will limit the planting options (with respect to root space and tree location). There will be a 4 foot 3 inch planting area. Consequently, the lighting and type of tree will depend of the zone. If utility wires remain above ground, this could limit the tree selection to those of a certain height. In terms of maintenance, irrigation is needed for the trees along with better soil to help the roots grow. From Henderson to Norfolk, there are wide curb cuts and industrial type of conditions exist. There is not a sidewalk per say so there won't be as many opportunities for trees. Good site distance will be needed in this area. Stations will have larger trees and as much ground cover as possible. In core areas, three feet of width is needed to plant ground coverings. The goal for paving of the tracks is create a barrier so that people won't want to cross them. We want to discourage the temptation to cross and perhaps the drainage design may aid in this also.

Phil Fuji from Seattle City Light shared his concerns. He would like to see the new lights incorporated with the old. To incorporate a whole new lighting system would be a huge expense and City Light is concerned about this. They want to know more about the maintenance, longevity, and durability of the lights that are going to be used along MLK Jr. Right now they are dealing with one manufacturer who provides four choices for various types of neighborhoods. It would be less costly, in way of maintenance, for all lights to be from one manufacturer. Regarding the underground utilities, City Light is willing to commit \$200,000 towards this. He emphasized that private utilities should not be allowed to do cost recovery from private citizens. He is concerned about the scope of work and the budget involved regarding the Edmunds to Henderson area. Phil relayed concerns the Fire Department has about access for emergency response vehicles. There is one fire station west of MLK Jr. and two on the east side. They are looking at changing response routes, and rethinking an earlier preference for rolled curbs—now the thinking is that rolled curbs would be too easy for other drivers to also drive up over. Predictable access is now seen as more important than unlimited access. They also would like to see fencing only at stations and pedestrian islands.

The Seattle Housing Authority then spoke, mentioning three main concerns regarding Rainier Vista:

- 1) Utility relocation regarding stormwater flow (otherwise will need on-site detention)
- 2) Final right-of-way width, and
- 3) Pedestrian crossing and relocation of existing intersections.

Overall SHA feels the combination of their project and Sound Transit's is a real win-win situation.

Shane DeWald, from Seatran, said she would like to see the tree matrix mentioned by Henry Boyar, and said she is viewing this project as she does private development; not requiring irrigation, but encouraging it. The City will likely take a stronger stand on the choice and location of trees if we maintain vs. Sound Transit. We are looking at alternatives to "structural soil" because we've heard it isn't permeable.

### Discussion

- Make sure we have big enough trees, started early enough, to replace the ones that will be lost. Will all the existing trees be lost, including any on the triangular pieces of land. (Yes, all but about 8 trees.)
- Is this a net loss or gain? (We don't know yet; this is predicated on the right-of-way constraints.) The sooner you know this, the better.
- What is that jog in the crosswalk? (It is there on purpose to force the pedestrian to look toward ongoing traffic before venturing into the next lane.)
- I'm not excited about lamps sending light into the air. Why light the air and not the ground? Look at how this lighting scheme will work with future projected growth. Do a test. Also, I echo Paul Bay's concern that the light poles need to work with the OCS.
- Given Seattle City Light's constraints on lighting fixtures, maybe it is worth looking at something to attach to one of the City Light standards. Go with what we've already got. Since this involves about 1000 lights, keep in mind that if a new light pole is approved, it will be adding new maintenance costs which could otherwise be averted using an existing design that the City already has.
- Or maybe there are enough lights needed here to make it worth buying something special. (The type of pole will be looked at again, especially given its relationship to the OSC. The community supports the corridor of lights. Even if a nonstandard pole was used, the bulb could still meet City standards.)
- Is this an attitude or specific pole you're presenting? (A specific pole design.)
- I would go even further and say that given the relationship of the OCS to lighting, we need to see more choices and rationale for them. I can't recommend approval of this lighting fixture without more information and discussion. (That's where we starting—supporting the Corridor of Lights concept, maybe with existing City Light fixtures.)
- Paving is raising some questions as well for me. Five miles is a long length of pavement!
- Regarding the heavier broom pattern, at Pike/Pine there was success in lightening up the pavement another way. Will the heavy broom pattern lead to less reflectivity? (I've seen it work well back East. In this climate, the street trees will affect light reflectivity more. A standard broom finish just doesn't provide the effect we want.)
- Are legacy trees proposed to be next to streets, and if so, doesn't that "hem them in?" I want to see a consistent pattern.
- Will tree selection and spacing be the same on both sides of the street? I appreciate the density of planting and species, but a mirror image may not be the best answer.
- Make sure the commercial areas have high-limbed trees to ensure visibility of shops. (Yes, that has been a major issues for the Vietnamese community, along with issues of feng shui. The trees could be clustered.)
- When the contract is let for growing the trees, ensure that trees keep growing after transplanting, and maybe buy extra trees to ensure there is no transplant shock at the time of replanting.

- The pedestrian island section view doesn't look very safe. Could a decorative railing be placed somewhere along with low level shrubs at both ends?
- In between stations, what is the train speed? (35 mph)
- The transition zones between the residential/commercial/industrial tree designs are too many and too long—they take away from the concept of the other sections.
- Does your “theming” and mapping work take into account Station Area Planning projections for future growth? Will there be more commercial here later? (Not at Edmunds, and maybe some at Henderson, but mostly we're projecting more growth in existing commercial areas.)
- What about historical light fixtures along Edmunds to Columbia City? (The early design work showed that with brick paving, and we're looking closer at those ideas now along with other themes.)
- I have questions about the operation of MLK, but will save them for another time.
- From Rainier Planning Chair, Ruth Kerkowski: I'm concerned about the vastness of paving involved. It is better to have more trees and broader trees to mitigate that swath of concrete.
- Yes, we keep hearing that there will be no trees on the platforms due to safety issues. We are very concerned about this. At intersections there will be 114' r-o-w with limited canopy size because of truck traffic. We need something tall and green there! The LRRP and Sound Transit are heading for a collision on this issue if we don't discuss it soon. Seatran has said street trees are the lowest maintenance cost of any landscaping. (We've been doing research on what other systems do, but so far have directed designers not to show trees in the public meetings because we don't want to get people's enthusiasm up for something if we later find we can't provide it. Paul Bay added that he wasn't aware this was a safety issue; just a design issue.)
- What is the community's feeling about the number of crossings? (We are installing more ped-only signals as a result of community feedback—there will be 28 places for pedestrians to cross safely, vs. 14 places now.)
- The pedestrian-only crossings are a great addition. The real challenges are at the intersections with east/west left turns I competition with pedestrian crossings. The reality is these are not crossings anyone would make if they didn't have to. (I disagree; I think we'll have more crossings after MLK is redesigned.) It is horrible now, but will it be what it needs to be afterwards? It would be helpful to have better visualization tools to show the community. This also has a lot to do with the scale of development along the corridor.
- It is apparent that the ends of the platforms end up being pedestrian islands too. Where is the fare-paid zone and how does it feel to be in it? Is there a non-hostile area for non-riders or people who haven't paid yet? A lot of pedestrian/vehicle accidents happen at right turns. This will be a challenge with a bus circulation system vs. off-street facility. Lastly, I understand that the TPSS can be a backdrop to bike storage, but I don't see these inextricably linked. Why put the TPSS at stations where you want the maximum development potential? So leave the TPSS at Graham?

Jon Layzer concluded discussion by saying the Panel would take no formal action tonight, but reserve the option of reading the meeting notes and then taking formal action at the next meeting. The meeting then adjourned at 6:20 pm.